

**Hanging in the balance:
When refugee learners' naturalization depends on their acquisition of
cultural knowledge and English language proficiency**

A dissertation submitted
by

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Abstract

This research investigated the educational, social, political and philosophical constructs of the Australian Citizenship Test (ACT) test, which were found to be problematic in design, and exclusionary in effect on African Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants (RHEs) from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB), who begin with limited or no print literacy skills in their first language (L1) and have limited literacy skills in English language (L2), yet these immigrants need Australian citizenship the most. It explored and interpreted the role of the ACT in determining the factors and conditions this subgroup perceived as affecting their integration into Australian society. In a case study approach, first, 30 English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers of the Adult Migrant English Program (AMEP), from 15 institutions, participated in a survey. Second, in one regional area, ten teachers were interviewed, classroom observations were made, and students interviewed. Finally, eight NESB, RHEs were purposively selected to investigate their individual literacy difficulties, and their perceptions of the challenge of social integration. This subgroup of refugees was found to have such an impoverished knowledge of first language literacy skills and learning skills that they were unable to build sufficient literacy in a time frame that was conducive to the need for citizenship and its accompanying benefits. Being in this ‘catch-twenty-two’ situation and combined with their lack of empowerment through English literacy, contributed to feelings of frustration, and being overwhelmed and depressed. The findings indicated that this group with limited or no print literacy skills in L1 and no literacy skills in L2 faced a number of social exclusionary practices in their integration process. Key recommendations advised: (i) typical ESL pedagogical practices need to be more invitational for this group and better designed to take account of their literacy development within the context of their refugee life experiences and personal histories, and (ii) the initial curriculum needs to include (a) a deeper appreciation of their lack of preparedness to become proficient in the English language and be able to read and write, and (b) the language, cultural, social and emotional barriers that mitigate preparing for the ACT. Overall, these findings suggest there is an optimum time for awarding full citizenship rights, which point to the need for a different type of test or process, that can ensure such refugees ‘societal advantage’ rather than them being left ‘hanging in the balance.’

CERTIFICATE OF DISSERTATION

The work submitted in this dissertation is original, except as acknowledged in the text. The material herein has not been submitted, either in whole or in part, for any other award at this or other university except where acknowledged.

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Dedication

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Related works

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List of Acronyms

ACA	Australian Citizenship Amendment
ACT	Australian Citizenship Test
AHP	Australia's Humanitarian Program
AHRC	Australian Human rights Commission
ALTE	Association of Language Testers in Europe
AMEP	Adult Migrant Education Program
AMES	Adult Migrants Education service
ASR	Australian Survey Research
ASLPR	Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings Scale
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills
CA	Content Analysis
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Background Migrants
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CCM	Constant Comparative Method
CEFR,	Common European Framework of Reference
CoE	Council of Europe
CPSU	Community and Public sector Union
CPSWE	Certificate of Preliminary Spoken and Written English
CSA	Civil Service Association
CSWE	Certificate in Spoken and Written English
DIAC	Department of Immigration and Citizenship
DIBP	Department of Immigration and Border Protection
DIMA	Department of Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs
ESB	English-speaking background
ECCV	Ethnic Communities' Council of Victoria
ECCQ	Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland
ESL	English as a Second Language
<u>FECCA</u>	Federation of Ethnic Communities Councils of Australia
<u>FASSTT</u>	Forum of Australian Services for Survivors of Torture and Trauma
<u>HREOC</u>	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
ICERD	International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination

IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
ISLPR	International Second Language Proficiency Rating scale
L1	First Language
L2	Second Language
LESLLA	Low-Educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition
NESB	Non-English speaking background
NNS	Non-native speakers
NSWTF	New South Wales Teachers' Federation
PET	Preliminary English Test (PET)
RCOA	Refugee Council of Australia
RHE	Refugee and Humanitarian Entrants
RSHP	Refugee and Special Humanitarian Program
RWZ	Refugee Welcome Zone
SHP	Special Humanitarian Program
SIOP	Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol
SSCLCA	Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TPVs	Temporary Protection Visa holders
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UG	Universal Grammar